

Appendix 4

Site Visit Agenda and Interview Guide

The VR&E Task Force visited the following VA Regional Offices:

Atlanta, GA	San Diego, CA
Baltimore, MD	St. Paul, MN
Chicago, IL	St. Petersburg, FL
Denver, CO	Waco, TX
Manchester, NH	Washington, DC
Montgomery, AL	Winston-Salem, NC

Standard Agenda for Visits

The Task Force developed an interview survey guide to ensure consistency in addressing program issues. VA Regional Offices provided read-ahead materials and the following standard agenda was used when conducting a site visit:

1. Introductory Meeting with Director and Regional Office Leadership Team
2. VR&E Staff – discussion and exchange of information on “how work is done” pertaining to VR&E services. Topics will include administrative functions of oversight, management controls, standardization, fiscal integrity, and quality review. Focus of discussions will center on:
 - Intake and evaluation process
 - Vocational Rehabilitation plan development, training approval, and implementation
 - Self-employment
 - Independent living
 - Employment Services
 - Case Management and workload
 - Use of contractors
 - Paying for services provided by VA – approval, payment, audit
 - Outcome measures
 - Employee training
 - External communications and outreach efforts
3. Brief overview of DTAP, if applicable
4. Information exchange session with VSO representatives
5. During the day, conduct short interviews with VR&E staff
6. If time permits, meet with veterans who are currently enrolled in vocational rehabilitation training or have completed training.
7. Exit interview with Director

Interview Guide

The Task Force asked the following types of questions during site visits to VA Regional Offices.

Internal Assessment

Mission and Strategic Plan

1. Who should be served and how?
2. How is mission communicated and enforced?
3. What are most veterans looking for when they come through your door?
4. Are their expectations in line with the VR&E mission?
5. What do you do as outreach to veterans?
6. Do you conduct any type of customer satisfaction survey?
7. If so, what are results? What can be improved?
8. Are you aware of the Department's strategic goal to assist disabled veterans?

Workforce and Workload

1. FTE staffing levels for recent years? What is 2004 projection?
2. How are FTE allocated?
3. Total contracted staff? What is basis for size?
4. Do you have an employment specialist? What is role and could it be expanded?
5. Plan for Workforce aging and recruitment?
6. How is workload defined? How should workload be defined?
7. How to forecast?
8. How do you define productivity?
9. What is distribution of caseloads for different kinds of specialists? What can be improved?
10. Could more rehab counselors work on employment?
11. Could veterans with less severe disabilities be self-directed?

Accountability and Performance Measures

1. As an office, what are you measuring?
2. Are performance goals tied to employment outcomes?
3. Discuss performance evaluations.
4. Do you have CO guidance for core jobs? Who is authorized to use credit card to procure goods or services?
5. Are regulations in place to define what can be procured?
6. What spending controls are in place (or are needed)?
7. What improvements are needed?
8. What needs to be measured that isn't being measured?

Training

1. Describe methodology and program.
2. Ensure uniform doctrine, procedures, and standards for staff and contractors? Use of Orlando training group's capabilities?
3. What are you doing about educating –or reeducating - counselors to focus on jobs?
4. What improvements are needed?

Procurement and Contracts

1. What is rationale for outsourcing?
2. Standard statement of work?
3. Type of contract?
4. Provide listing of all staff support contracts with contractor names and costs.
5. Basis for competition and selection?
6. Evaluation criteria?
7. Turnover rate?
8. How is quality managed?
9. How are contractors held accountable?
10. Ideas for improvements?

Corporate WINRS

1. Do you use all features?
2. Do you have CO managerial and functional guidelines?
3. Do all staff and contractors have access?
4. Do all use?
5. Is it easy and fast to use including out stations?
6. What data elements are missing that would help focus on employment goal?
7. How do you use it as a management tool?
8. Ideas for improvements?

Best Practices/Special Projects

1. What makes your office unique?
2. What are you doing that could be adopted by other offices?
3. What best practices have you heard of that you might be willing to adopt?

Service Integration**Screening and Pre-Screening**

1. Please describe your time line, approach, and resources.
2. What is your opinion on using a pre-screening effort to better inform service-connected veterans about VR&E?

Seamless Continuum of Services

1. Do you have a presence at DoD or VHA facilities? If so, please describe.
2. What is your opinion on how to achieve seamless service?

Assessment Resources

1. What assessment tools or resources would you like to have that you don't have?
2. What are obstacles?

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1. Do you use this authority for providing up front assessment and career planning?
2. If yes, please explain.

Performance Measures

1. What performance measures do you have for evaluation and assessment, including timeliness?
2. What performance measures would you design to make improvements?

Outreach

1. What do you do as outreach to veterans and stakeholders on VR&E mission and services?
2. How could this be improved?

Employment**Measures**

1. Do you have employment-focused goals?
2. What are your employment placement figures for recent years?
3. How do these compare with other offices?
4. How do they compare with employment placement figures of other organizations serving disabled persons, including veterans?
5. What are job placement results of veterans in training?
6. If no figures are available, how do you know that VR&E has success?
7. If yes, can they be made available?

Staff Functions and Training

1. What are the training and experience of VR&E staff in employment and employability functions?
2. Do you have an employment specialist?
3. Describe duties, performance standards, training, and supervision.

4. What is relationship between the VRC, supervisor and employment specialist?
5. Could many veterans be self-directed in job search?
6. Could Voc Rehab resources then be directed toward job placement?
7. Ideas for improvement
8. What management approaches would inspire and motivate staff and veterans to reach their greatest potential?

Methods

1. How are you assisting disabled veterans with their job search?
2. What works best?
3. Are your approaches consistent with other offices?

Placement Resources

1. What resources are you using to help veterans compete for job?
2. Do you use the Internet, job software and other electronic resources?
3. What resources do you need that you don't have?

Partnerships

1. Do you partner with other agencies, companies, or nonprofits? Describe.
2. What is the relationship between your staff and DOL VETS funded state staff?
3. Is it more than referral?
4. Do you have staff with authorized access to job postings, including employer name, at the employment service office?
5. Ideas for improvements?

Vocational-Technical Training and OJT

1. Why do so few veterans pursue vocational or technical fields, apprentice training, or on the job training?
2. Is this an issue to be tackled?

Employers

1. What is your outreach to potential employers?
2. What is your office culture as it relates to the employer as a customer?
3. What records, if any, do you keep on local employers who have employers in meetings, advisory panels, are hiring and/or recruiting veterans?
4. What services if any do you offer employers on behalf of disabled veterans?
5. How do you deal with identifying and providing accommodations for more severely disabled veterans?
6. How do you measure if a veteran gains employment?

Barriers

1. What are barriers to employment?
2. Location? Few available jobs? Economy?
3. What are you doing to overcome?

Independent Living

1. What are your greatest concerns about this service?
2. Could state-of-the-art technology mean that additional severely disabled veterans might be able to join the workforce?
3. Are there protocol standards in place to make an assessment?
4. How does VR&E measure success?
5. What is level of coordination with VHA?
6. Do you use contractors to make assessment?
7. How do you measure performance of contractors?

Self-Employment

1. What is expected of a veteran seeking financial support from VR&E?
2. What type of assessment process is in place? Is there a standard used

- throughout the system or is each Regional Office on own to make determination?
3. Who is involved in the process – from start to approval?
 4. Does VR&E require a follow-up or feedback from veteran?
 5. Does regional office use non-VA organizations to educate veteran about self-employment?
 6. What outside experts does VR&E use to help assess a business plan?
 7. Are there standards in place to make a determination?
 8. Can you share some success stories? Some failures?
 9. Are there current dollar thresholds for self-employment?
 10. How does VR&E measure success – what is a good measurable outcome?
 11. What are your ideas on improvement?

12. How does VR&E reduce barriers to self-employment?

Summary

Name the three things that the Department of Veterans Affairs, VBA, or VHA could do in the continuum of service that would impact such things as:

- Reducing application time for VR&E services
- Improving assessment accuracy
- Promoting standardization of decisions
- Measuring impact that VA services have on the veteran's life
- Increasing percentage of disabled veterans that successfully compete for employment.

